

AIR WAR COLLEGE

AIR UNIVERSITY

AIR FORCE OFFICER FORCE DEVELOPMENT,  
AN ANALYSIS AND FUTURE ISSUES

by

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

*Appropriate talent is needed at all levels if distinguished service is to be performed.*

*Karl von Clausewitz*

*“Force Development will enable us to focus on each individual by emphasizing our common airman culture while offering a variety of choices that respects the distinctive elements of your career field. We plan to add a dimension to your educational experience that has not been fully exploited in our current PME and advanced educational structure. Most importantly, we have made sure that this new emphasis reflects a sincere respect for your time – time that you owe to other priorities in your life, like your families.”*

*CSAF Sight Picture 6 Nov 2002*

The quote above is taken from the Chief of Staff, United States Air Force, Sight Picture announcing a new philosophy for the development of the Air Force’s number one resource; people.<sup>1</sup> This paper will review the Air Force’s new Force Development construct as it applies to the officer corps. It will also offer insights on how to ensure it is successful and enduring. The analysis will take place using John P. Kotter’s eight steps for leading change. It will review the Force Development construct and analyze it from a frame of reference that considers why transforming organizations fail and what can be done to reduce the risk of failure. The intent is to identify any shortcomings in the construct, highlight processes requiring change, and assist the Air Force in building the road to a more robust, better educated, and visionary officer corps. To begin the process, it is necessary to first look at the Officer Force Development program as it currently exists and understand where the Air Force is headed in the 21st Century.

There are two major initiatives underway. The first focuses on the educational opportunities afforded to officers. The second is to establish career development teams to guide officer development over the course of a career.

Jump-starting the educational process in 2003, the Air Force will send more than 140 additional officers to the Air Force Institute of Technology, the Naval Postgraduate School, and the Joint Military Intelligence College to gain their Intermediate Developmental Education.<sup>2</sup> Also changing is the way the Air Force promotes Advanced Academic Degrees (AAD). No longer will officers be encouraged to get advanced academic degrees that do not benefit them or the Air Force.

The second initiative establishes Development Teams for each career field. The objective of each team is to maximize the potential of each officer and deliver the best return for the Air Force. Representatives from the MAJCOMs and the Air Staff will comprise the teams. Each team will review an officer's credentials at three levels in a career and also review the officer's stated assignment preferences and career goals. At the tactical, operational, and strategic levels, the Development Team will make recommendations to the officer, his supervisor, and AFPC on what assignment best meets the needs of the Air Force and the interests of the officer. This assignment system is not a return to the all-volunteer assignment system of the early 1990s.

However, Force Development is more than assignments and Professional Military Education. It really focuses on a crucial part of successful senior officers, the development of leadership and management skills. It is important to note that both are necessary in a successful large organization. The term "manager" often evokes a negative response from many senior leaders, perhaps a side effect of the Vietnam era and more recently, the Total Quality Management approach. Management development is more closely related to developing

particular skills such as finance, command and control technology, acquisition, and contracting.

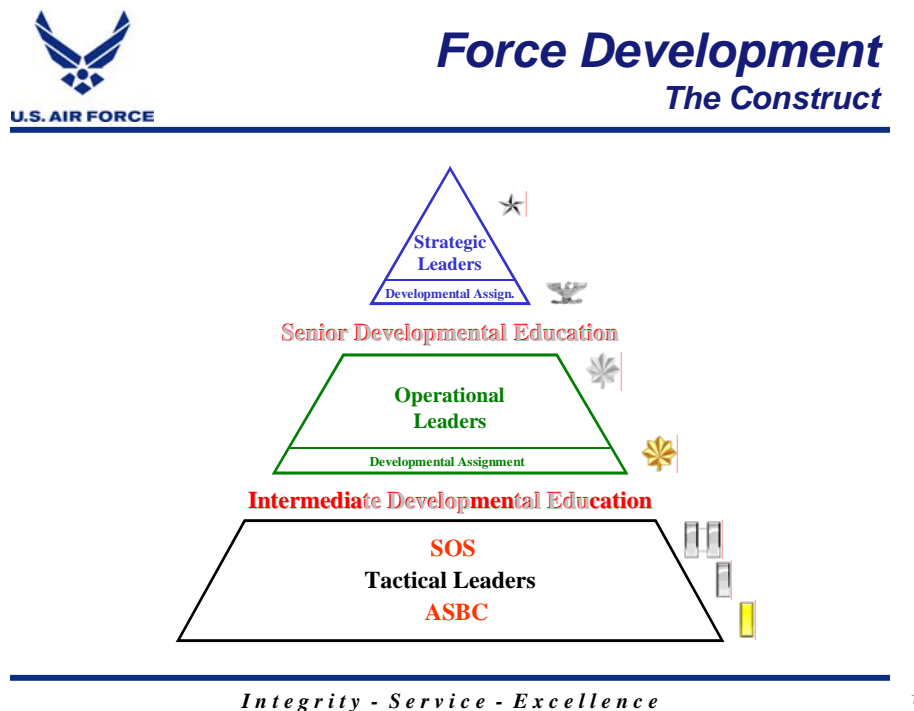
There is a distinct difference between management and leadership, but both are needed within the Air Force.<sup>3</sup> Great leaders are also great managers. Noted leadership author John W. Gardner describes the role of leaders best in the following quote from his book, *No Easy Victories*.

Leaders have a significant role in creating the state of mind that is society. They can serve as symbols of the moral unity of the society. They can express the values that hold the society together. Most important, they can conceive and articulate goals that lift people out of their petty preoccupations, carry them above the conflicts that tear a society apart, and unite them in pursuit of objectives worthy of their best efforts.

Nothing to it, right? Many officers assume, over the course of a military career, that the qualities, capabilities, and education to be a leader accrue through the efforts of the officer and the Air Force. The current slogan for the new United States Air Force Force Development construct is “The Right Person, at the Right Place, at the Right Time.” The new Force Development construct presupposes that officer development in recent years has occurred through chance development, and not a coherent plan. That may be overstating the situation since most officers do take an interest in their careers and attempt to get the best assignments to aid in their development. Perhaps a more accurate statement would be that officer development has functioned under the auspices of chaos theory. Seemingly random events in the early stages of a career have far-reaching effects. The sometimes chance assignment to challenging positions still develops new leaders, although the methodology may not be recognized as a “plan.” In either case, the lack of a coherent plan for officer development has perhaps ignored the growth of officers with significant potential, but who are unaware of the opportunities available, and may be overlooked by the “system.”

Force Development is not just another assignment system or way to manage PME. It is the first real attempt in many years to link strategic goals of officer development, guided by career

field experts and doctrine, to the assignment process and educational opportunities. The Air Force is looking at the skills, assignments, and educational opportunities of current senior leaders. By looking back through time, the Air Force can “illuminate” what paths were most helpful in producing leaders and managers capable of operating at the strategic level. By growing senior officers through better processes, the service gains better leaders at all levels. Transforming assignments to give individuals more control over their career while meeting the needs of the Air Force through more well-rounded leaders is another way to improve the officer corps. The figure below represents the growth from tactical to strategic leaders.



**Figure 1 Air Force Force Development Construct**  
**Source AF/DPLE**

The Air Force is currently finalizing leadership and officer development doctrine. A draft version of the forthcoming leadership doctrine defines officer development as:

A series of experiences and challenges, combined with educational and training opportunities that are directed at producing airmen who possess the requisite skills, knowledge, experience and motivation to lead and execute the full spectrum of Air Force missions.

At the tactical level, Force Development is focused on honing followers, motivating subordinates and influencing peers. Officers at this level are learning the culture of the Air Force and internalizing the core values.

At the operational level, Force Development is where officers transition from a tactical specialty to integrating their knowledge into achieving greater team accomplishments. In addition to developing personal leadership, officers will begin to develop institutional leadership abilities.

At the strategic level, officers combine all their previous experiences and education to provide broad leadership. An understanding of interservice, multinational, and interagency relationships is required and is supplemented with the team building and people skills acquired over the course of a career.

Officer development is proceeding through significant change in the selection process and availability of PME, and in the assignment system. Any major change in an organization often has problems. Anguish and wasted effort are usually avoidable by studying how other large organizations have successfully navigated through the change process. There are eight parts of the change process that deserve careful review with the Air Force's new Force Development construct in mind.

## Chapter 2

### Reviewing Force Development Using an Eight Stage Process

*The first duty of a leader is to create more leaders.*

*General W.F. Creech, USAF*

#### Kotter's Eight Steps

John P. Kotter is a Konosuke Matsushita Professor of Leadership at the Harvard Business School, and is an internationally recognized author on leadership, management and change. He is a graduate of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Harvard University and has been on the Harvard Business School faculty since 1972. He is the distinguished author of ten best-selling books on management and leadership, including *Leading Change*, *What Leaders Really Do*, *What Every Leader Should Know*, and *Heart of Change*. Drawing on the history of recent successes and failures in the business world, he explores the new rules of leadership and the importance of lifelong learning. His insights into managing change were used by large companies such as The Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company and AlliedSignal Incorporated. Internationally recognized for his leadership innovations, his concepts are equally applicable to large bureaucratic organizations like the U.S. Air Force. He provides an eight-stage process for transforming visionary concepts to concrete reality.

The figure below lists the eight steps of Kotter's process of creating major change.

- |   |
|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. <b>Establish a Sense of Urgency</b></li><li>2. <b>Create the Guiding Coalition</b></li><li>3. <b>Develop a Vision and Strategy</b></li></ol> |
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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>4. <b>Communicate the Change Vision</b></li><li>5. <b>Empower Broad-Based Action</b></li><li>6. <b>Generate Short-Term Wins</b></li><li>7. <b>Consolidate Gains and Produce More Change</b></li><li>8. <b>Anchor New Approaches in the Culture</b></li></ol> |
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**Figure 2 The Eight-Stage Process of Creating Major Change<sup>4</sup>**

### **Establishing a Sense of Urgency**

It is very tough to make significant changes in a large organization, and tougher still to make those changes stick. Major changes are often associated with a broken process or flawed institution. Establishing a sense of urgency in those cases is clearly needed, but for the USAF, the process under which officers are developed is not broken. In any organization pushing to improve, a great deal of cooperation, initiative, and self-sacrifice will be required. Why then should there be a sense of urgency? The desire is to install a better process, but unless a sense of urgency is established, the inertia of the large bureaucracy will quickly overwhelm change efforts. Kotter claims as many as 15,000 in an organization of 100,000 must go beyond the call of duty to produce significant change.<sup>5</sup> Crucial to creating change are the initial changes and getting leaders at all levels on board with the effort. Critical to getting leadership moving is the need to understand the types of personalities involved. Some personality types are more resistant to the initial stages of change, especially when entrenched in a large bureaucracy. When things are going well, as they are with the current Officer Assignment and Promotion system, bureaucracies will often have great inertia and resistance to change. A valid question might be, “What might be the effect if the Air Force has a large population of officers who are resistant to change, or prefer the status quo when things seem to be working well?”

One instrument used by the Air Force is the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, usually referred to as the MBTI. The MBTI is a psychological assessment tool that is concerned with human

preferences in four categories of mental functioning. Those preferences appear daily in leadership, and may be especially true when performing strategic tasks, such as making changes to meet the goals of Force Development. Why is that important to the Air Force? A review of general officers' MBTI results in 1995 revealed that 50 percent were of a temperament called "guardians." A review of Air War College classes from 1993-2003 showed 54 percent of the students to have the same temperament.<sup>6</sup> "Guardians" hunger for responsibility and predictability. They like standard operating procedures, trust the past and tradition, and seek security and stability. Those characteristics can be a liability when major changes are occurring since they are often moved out of their "comfort zone."<sup>7</sup> Recognizing specific characteristics within the Air Force senior leadership provides a greater understanding of the dynamics of leadership, what may be causing some of the early resistance, and why it is often so difficult to achieve lasting change. Leaders often underestimate how hard it is to make major changes in an organization. Without a sense of urgency, Air Force members, civilian employees, and contractors may not put forth the extra effort required to change something that is apparently working fine. Getting that many officers out of their comfort zone and into the realm of real change requires that Air Force leaders demand changes be made soon. The push to begin curriculum changes at Air Command and Staff College, and to increase the number of majors attending Intermediate Development Education (IDE) early in the process is a good example of establishing a sense of urgency. Under orders to make changes for the 2004 academic year, the personnel system, from the 3-star at the top, to the assignment officers at the Air Force Personnel Center, had to respond. There was little time to sit back, study the issue, and let the normal bureaucratic process stretch on for months or years. PME and assignment policies, curricula changes, and facilities plans were just a few of the "deliverables" the Chief of Staff expected to see and approve to

accomplish the first major milestone. There was almost certainly some complaining about the hard push, but low and behold, the Air Force has a changed curriculum at Air Command and Staff College, and increased numbers attending the Air Force Institute of Technology for IDE Masters' Degrees. It is, however, important to note that not all officers are affected by these early changes and do not feel any real sense of urgency. Discussions with young officers attending Squadron Officers' School reveal their supervisors are still advising them to seek a master's degree. Many of today's squadron commanders still recall the masking and unmasking of advanced academic degrees in the early 1990s. As such, there appears to be huge skepticism among officers in the field. Kotter offers ways to raise the urgency level across the entire organization. One method in particular is open and honest discussions of problems with the current way of doing business.<sup>8</sup> The Air Force should consider moving away from, "everything is fine, but we need to change" to "let me give you some specific examples of what is wrong with the way we currently train and assign our officers." Once the officers, and especially those recalcitrant supervisors, are aware of why change is needed, they will be far more likely to acquire their own sense of urgency.

### **Creating a Guiding Coalition**

Lasting, major change in an organization and bureaucracy as large as the Air Force requires a powerful force to sustain the process. A single individual at the top may create the vision, but cannot fully develop it, consider the ramifications and unintended consequences, and communicate it.<sup>9</sup> The comeback of Chrysler in the 1980s is associated with Lee Iacocca and the renewal of IBM brings to mind the efforts of Lou Gerstner. However, the CEO, or in this case the Chief of Staff, cannot sustain the process of implementing major change alone. When all major decisions are held at the top, the danger of impeding progress and slowing communication

is very real. Building a team is essential. The leader must carefully build a coalition of key, well placed, highly qualified people from the breadth of the organization. There are several things to consider when putting together a guiding coalition. First, are there enough key players on board to ensure any naysayers along the way cannot disrupt the path to change? Second, is there enough expertise on all points of view to ensure intelligent decision-making? Third, are the reputations of the guiding coalition members good enough to be taken seriously by all parts of the organization? Last, does the group include enough proven leaders, both formal and informal, to drive the change process?<sup>10</sup> In the Air Force, a Force Development Council chaired by the Vice Chief of Staff will oversee the program's policy. Also on this council are the Air Staff's 3-star deputy chiefs and the vice commander of each Air Force major command. This council would seem to meet the above criteria. However, some negative feedback from older company grade and younger field officers is present<sup>11</sup>, with the gist of the complaint being that general officers are too far removed from today's young officers to understand how they see their careers or family life. That is not a new problem. In every discussion of assignments or PME, there has always been the belief by the younger officers that the preceding generation is out of touch with their desires. Is this the beginning of a significant problem or just old wine in new skins? Although generational differences can be found all the way back to earliest military records, it may also be the first indications of true dissatisfaction among young officers.

### **Developing Vision and Strategy**

What is vision? It is not predicting the future, but rather constructing the future you want. Leaders wishing to transform an organization do not just think up a vision and sell it to the followers. A vision must take into account cause and effect to reach the desired future.<sup>12</sup> When asked about great transformations, most people will associate a single person at the top of the

organization with the big changes. Certainly, that was the case of the USAF's Objective Wing Structure as it was envisioned and enacted by former CSAF General Merrill McPeak. That structure has been "tweaked" in recent years, but the basic structure is still in place. Why is vision so important? It serves three purposes in the case of Force Development. First, by describing the vision of a changed assignment process and developmental education, the Air Force leadership has defined the direction for change. Second, it has motivated other senior leaders to take action in the right direction to transform processes to reach the desired end state. Third, a communicated vision helps coordinate the actions of many different organizations within the Air Force.

A key aspect of the vision of Force Development is the drive to create a much larger group of great officers and leaders. The Air Force has aimed too low, for too long, in its leadership development activities. Michelangelo said, "The greatest danger for most of us is not that our aim is too high and we miss it, but that is too low and we reach it."<sup>13</sup> In the past, the Air Force, has created a few outstanding leaders, and underdeveloped a large portion of the rest of the officer corps. Crucial to developing great leaders of the past and present was providing the best and brightest the opportunity to observe senior leaders in action. When asked how to develop decision makers, General Eisenhower replied, "Be around people making decisions. Those officers who achieved the top positions of leadership were around decision makers, who served as their mentors."<sup>14</sup> That style of leadership development is not wrong and produced some outstanding leaders for all branches of the military over the past 50 years. Unfortunately, it is a narrowly focused approach that fails to provide for the development of the broad base of officers supporting the great leaders. The vision of Force Development must supplant the old notions of officer development. It must create a culture where leaders, and followers, of the 21st century

can thrive on a broad education, devotion to long-term growth, a commitment to excellence, and a willingness to take risks.<sup>15</sup>

## **Communicating the Change Vision**

Once a vision is established, it is useless unless leadership finds a way to communicate it down through the entire organization. Leaders must manage the dream.<sup>16</sup> Creating a shared sense of a desirable goal is crucial to sustaining Force Development efforts. Many leaders undercommunicate, failing to recognize the vast quantities of information received in the modern age of email, internet, and cable media that compete for followers' attention. In *Leading Change*, John Kotter describes a situation where a vision presented through a 30-minute speech or a 600-word article captures approximately 0.6% of the communications share of an employee in a 2-month period. Certainly, the Air Force has covered a broad base of media sources. Articles were published in the *Air Force Times*, *Air Force Magazine*, and in base newspapers. Pamphlets were handed out at spread-the-word briefings, and a website is available with more information. This seems like a lot of information to those intimately familiar with the program and its processes, but for the vast majority of the Air Force, the message on officer development gets lost in the clutter of daily emails, newspapers, television, and meetings. For example, a flying squadron commander is already preoccupied with deployments, the new fitness program, performance reports, and quite possibly judicial or non-judicial punishment of a member of the squadron. The message and its intent may not ever be clearly understood, much less presented enthusiastically to subordinates.

To sustain focus, the Air Force must ensure a continuing coverage of the latest developments through various media. Fortunately, the spiral development lends itself well to continuing communication as further changes or refinements are made to the Force Development program. As the Air Force tells the story there are several guidelines, contained in the figure below that are key to effective communication.

- Simplicity*: Minimize jargon and do not assume that all officers understand assignments and developmental education
- Metaphor, analogy, and example*: Anecdotes on why the Air Force needs Force Development are great way to tell the story
- Multiple Forums*: Keep up the effort already underway. Remember that many younger officers gather tremendous amounts of information via email and the internet
- Repetition*: It is well proven that most people do not fully understand ideas until they have heard it many times.
- Give-and-take*: A single spread-the-word briefing will not suffice. Get out to the field multiple times as the process develops to answer questions. Two-way communication is always more powerful than one-way communication.
- Explain Inconsistencies*: Problems or efforts that unintended consequences must be addressed. Failure to do so will undermine credibility.

**Figure 3 Effective Communications Guidelines<sup>17</sup>**

### **Empowering Employees for Broad-Based Action**

Major transformation inside an organization as large as the Air Force cannot happen without the work of many individuals and the units they represent. The most common barrier is when personnel understand the vision and want to make it part of the Air Force, but are boxed in by regulations, instructions, or law. Certainly, the Air Force has taken big strides toward giving the necessary authority to make significant changes. Air University has already worked with the Air Force Personnel Center (AFPC) to increase enrollment in IDE by 50%. The curriculum has changed to become more modular. There is a common focus on leadership and warfighting, but there is, for the first time, going to be a module specifically dedicated to follow-on jobs. Providing necessary training to ensure the “right person at the right place” will put officers into

effective roles much sooner after graduating from IDE. Other broad-based action includes the creation of the Force Development teams to guide career paths and provide strategic direction to AFPC on assignment policies. Unfortunately, the word “empowerment” can bring out some rather disapproving frowns since many officers were disaffected of the Total Quality Management programs of the past. That bias can become an obstacle, so it is important that the focus be on getting the job done with all necessary support from above, not just the wording of the process. Another important part of making sure that people have the power to make changes is to ensure that supervisors and commanders who attempt to undercut the Force Development program are confronted and removed if necessary. Nothing discourages people about a major change more than a boss who makes disparaging remarks or openly defies the new program.

### **Generating Short-Term Wins**

Whenever major transformation is underway, short-term wins provide visible evidence of good things happening during the change. Personnel can see for themselves how Force Development is improving the way officers are grown. Short-term wins also must be unambiguous. There can be no doubt about what caused the win and why. In a similar vein, short-term wins must be clearly related to Force Development.<sup>18</sup> The figure below shows the role of short-term wins and the effects on the Air Force.

- Provide evidence that sacrifices are worth it:* The 50% increase in IDE helps justify the long hours necessary to adapt the process.
- Help fine-tune vision and strategies:* The urgency to change IDE will clarify the way ahead for changes in SDE.
- Undermine cynics:* Publicizing the wins helps eliminate people who are blocking the way by removing the argument of “it’s too big a change, they can never made it work.”
- Build momentum:* As personnel see good changes and improvements, the desire to become a part of successful change becomes greater.

**Figure 4 Role of Short-term Wins**

The Air Force needs to ensure the Developmental Team and assignment process flow smoothly and meet the goals of what Force Development is trying to accomplish. Although the Development Team process is new, early indications are that inputs provided via the Transitional Officer Development Plan are confusing and fail to provide meaningful guidance. The following example illustrates the problem. A lieutenant colonel, who is a graduated squadron commander, is currently attending Senior Developmental Education. He relayed that his assignment officer at the Air Force Personnel Center was given inconsistent and confusing inputs from members of the Developmental Team. The inputs passed to the assignment officer were a diverse listing that included a Joint job, Air Staff, deputy group command, and squadron command. This particular officer had already completed a joint tour and had commanded a squadron twice.<sup>19</sup> The inputs from the Developmental Team are too generic, lack a focused direction, and do not seem to make best use of the officer's background. Without meaningful guidance from the Developmental Team, the assignment officer is left to match an assignment based on business as usual. Unfortunately, this type of story seems to make its way around the "grapevine" very quickly and can negate the positive effects of short-term wins. Careful review of what inputs are provided from the Developmental Teams is necessary to turn "business as usual" into a "that really makes sense for me" situation that would reflect positively on the Air Force.

### **Consolidating Gains and Producing More Change**

Major change takes a long time, especially in an organization as large as the Air Force. There are several forces that can stall the process. New personnel in key positions and significant turnover of action officers on the Air Staff and at AFPC can create obstacles in the process. Resistance to change is always ready to reassert itself and tear down many of the new programs begun under Force Development.<sup>20</sup> Distractions, such as a major crisis or significant

events involving large portions of the Air Force, are also forms of resistance, although they are rarely recognized as such at the time. Major combat or humanitarian operations, especially those overseas, divert attention from efforts to make further changes. Certainly, support of combat, humanitarian, or relief operations takes priority, but a cardinal rule of transformation according to Kotter is “Whenever you let up before the job is done, critical momentum can be lost and regression may follow.” The decision to delay changes to SDE until the new Leadership doctrine is ready may be a clear case of letting up before the job is done. Although the doctrine is moving along rapidly, any unexpected delays may very well cascade downward and cause an updated SDE curriculum to slip another academic year. A continued focus by senior leadership is required to maintain clarity on the overall effort and keep the urgency level high.

### **Anchoring the Change in the Culture**

Most scholars agree that leaders are made, not born. However, some scholars also believe that adults learn best when they take charge of their own learning. Lessons on becoming a great leader, taught by some of the Air Force’s own general officers, expound on the need for self-education. General Arthur MacArthur, at his death, passed on more than four thousand books to his son Douglas. Other great military leaders who continued their education through prolific reading included Generals Robert E. Lee, George C. Marshall, Douglas MacArthur, Omar Bradley, Thomas D. White, and Admiral William J. Crowe, Jr.<sup>21</sup> Obviously there are many, many more, but the point is clear. Force Development cannot succeed solely based on the Air Force’s PME system. In the mid-1990s, the Air Force “issued” a substantial professional library to arriving ACSC students. The topics ranged broadly, covering such topics as women in the military, leadership development, strategy, and history. Unfortunately, budgetary constraints resulted in elimination of that program and books for professional development are collected at

the end of the program for re-use. The Air Force should reinstate the professional library program to aid in the growth of its new field grade officers. The growth of officers with a professional library provided by the Air Force will not happen overnight, but carefully chosen books may provide the foundation for greater growth and a lifetime of learning through reading and professional education. Perhaps the option to order a few books from a list that covers topics such as leadership, developing long range planning skills, or history would allow officers to focus on an area of particular interest, but still add to their overall growth. Indeed, it may be difficult to prove far-reaching effects, but any expansion of professional knowledge among the officer corps can only result in a positive outcome. Providing a few books, such as *The Transformation of American Airpower* by Benjamin Lambeth or *Winged Victory* by Geoffrey Perret, to attendees of ASBC and SOS, to jump-start their library, may be an excellent use of “venture capital.”

Another way to anchor the change in the culture is to ensure modules exist within ASBC, SOS, and ACSC that provide practical experience and examples of meaningful feedback, mentoring, and officer and enlisted developmental assignments. Repeated exposure to the vision and application of Force Development will steadily imbue the current and future generations of officers with the new ways of developing leaders. It is important to remember that anchoring the changes in the culture is not a short-term goal. It may take years to anchor the changes in the culture of the Air Force.

As an example of how long it can take to anchor change in culture, consider the congressional effort to improve the Joint Staff and develop a greater sense of jointness among the officer corps of the services. The Goldwater-Nichols Act was passed in 1986 and made sweeping changes to policy surrounding the assignments and qualifications of joint duty officers.

Change was made, but years passed before it became part of the culture of service assignments. Officers entering the service just before or since 1986 cannot describe what it was like to work on the Joint Staff before Goldwater-Nichols and now see joint assignments as crucial to understanding how best to employ the military instrument of power. Jointness has become part of the culture. So it will be with Force Development, if it survives through a generation of Air Force officers.

A crucial piece of the transformation process is to align structures with the vision.<sup>22</sup> There are two major processes the Air Force must change to align structures with the new vision of Officer Development. They are the Officer Evaluation System and the Officer Promotion System. They are barriers associated with a longstanding culture of “firewalling” reports on officers. They will be extremely difficult to change, but they must evolve to ensure that the “right person” is chosen to advance, to command, and ultimately to lead at the highest levels.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Future Issues**

#### **Officer Performance Review Changes**

Kotter states that personnel systems and structures not aligned with the vision will block needed action.<sup>23</sup> Stated another way, aligning personnel system structures to the vision opens the door for further clarity in officer development, and goes a long ways toward anchoring the change in the culture of the Air Force. It can be argued that the current Officer Performance Reports do not support the Force Development construct. They are little more than writing exercises to see which rater can create a word picture of glowing comments. There is little stratification and officers rarely receive any meaningful feedback on whether they have the potential to become commanders or senior leaders. Air Force Officer Performance Reports have the long-standing issue of inflated reports and no clear indication of command potential.<sup>24</sup> Discussions with students at Squadron Officer School reveal a lack on confidence in the evaluation system to provide a meaningful report on their performance and potential.

Across the Air Force, there are some officers who have received meaningful, realistic feedback and mentoring, but there are others who say they never knew they were not ‘in the running’ for command. Indeed, the first time they realized something was amiss in their career progression or potential was when they were passed over for promotion. With the tremendous numbers of company grade officers in the service right now, the Air Force owes it to them to

establish a performance evaluation system that is meaningful and has some means of controlling the inflation. With the promotion opportunity on the 2003 majors' board reaching an amazing 92 percent and almost 73 percent on the 2003 lieutenant colonel board<sup>25</sup>, many rising company grade officers may assume there is no significant challenge to becoming a field grade officer. However, a review of promotion statistics for the past 15 years reveals average promotion rates some 10 percent less than the 2003 rate and as much as 20 percent lower in some years.<sup>26</sup> Just as the “bathtub” of senior captains has caused an increase in promotion rates, the unusually large number of junior officers may cause a corresponding dip in promotion rates in future years. The Air Force must have a better way to accurately portray the abilities of these officers, both for the officers themselves, and for the promotion boards. The current Officer Promotion Report does not provide a methodology to provide meaningful feedback on the officer's next job or on command potential. One possibility is to consider the methods used by sister services. The figure below shows a portion of the backside of a Navy Fitness Report and Counseling Record. Block 40 provides the rater a chance to provide a next job recommendation.

39. TACTICAL PERFORMANCE: (Warfare qualified officers only) Basic and tactical employment of weapons systems.	- Has difficulty attaining qualification expected for the rank and experience. - Has difficulty in ship(s), aircraft or weapons systems employment. Below others in knowledge and employment. - Warfare skills in specialty are below standards compared to others of same rank and experience.	- Attains qualifications as required and expected. - Capably employs ship(s), aircraft, or weapons systems. Equal to others in warfare knowledge and employment. - Warfare skills in specialty equal to others of same rank and experience.	- Fully qualified at appropriate level for rank and experience. - Innovatively employs ship(s), aircraft, or weapons systems. Well above others in warfare knowledge and employment. - Warfare skills in specialty exceed others of same rank and experience.
NOB <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
40. I recommend screening this individual for next career milestone(s) as follows: (maximum of two) Recommendations may be for competitive schools or duty assignments such as: LCPO, DEPT CPO, SEA, CMC, CWO, LDO, Dept Head, XO, OIC, CO, Major Command, War College, PG School.			
41. COMMENTS ON PERFORMANCE: * All 1.0 marks, three 2.0 marks, and 2.0 marks in Block 34 must be specifically substantiated in comments. Comments must be verifiable. Font must be 10 or 12 Pitch (10 or 12 Point) only. Use upper and lower case.			

**Figure 5 Navy Office Performance Report Excerpt**

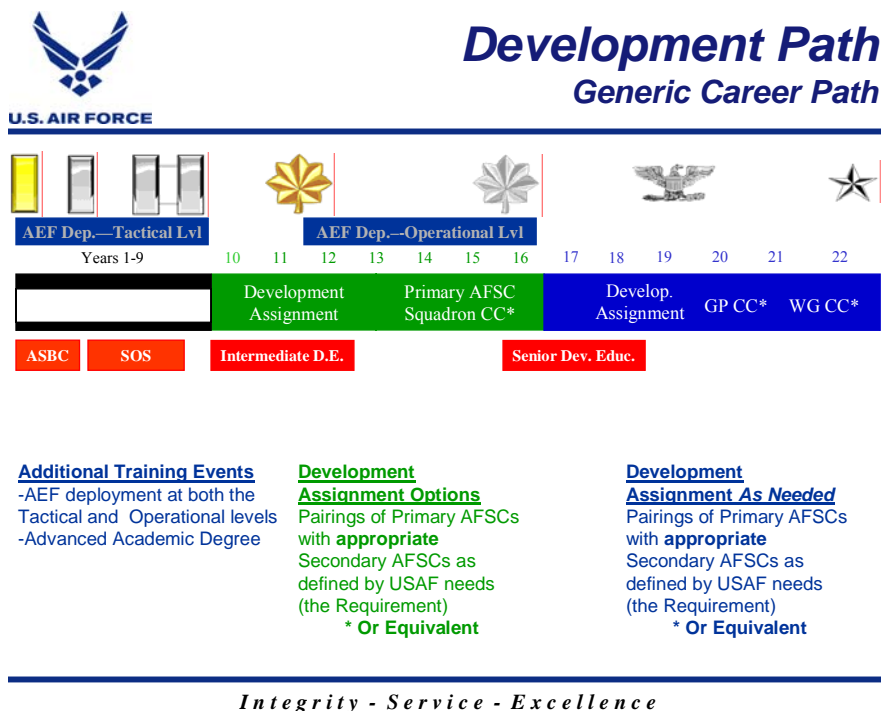
This is the first chance for the ratee to realize that he or she may not be on track for command if the job recommendation is not one that supports a command or senior leadership track. The Navy tracks the average rating given by its leaders and can provide meaningful back to command selection or promotion boards if an officer's ratings are above or below the average due to the rater being too "soft" or too "hard." The Navy also has members sign the report prior to its submission through personnel channels.<sup>27</sup> To open the Pandora's Box of officer evaluations is an undertaking of tremendous import and will require a level of effort approaching, or possibly exceeding that of Force Development. However, to provide the best opportunity for officer development and grow future leaders and managers, the Air Force must change the existing system and do so sooner rather than later. Providing honest feedback and building trust in the system through a fair and uninflated performance report is a powerful way to identify the strengths and weaknesses of officers. By doing so, the Air Force gives officers the opportunity to develop the strengths and mitigate the shortcomings in their leadership styles.<sup>28</sup>

Many young officers truly want to learn about their faults and strengths and what can be done to improve their performance. They dream of becoming great leaders, but too often are not aware of how they compare to their peers and are at a loss on how to begin the road to extraordinary leadership. In his book, *On Leadership*, John Gardner talks about leadership development being a lifelong growth process. It requires repeated opportunities for challenge as well as education.<sup>29</sup> In addition to providing feedback to the officer, a changed evaluation process will assist in the promotion process.

### **Promotion System Changes**

If the goal of the Air Force is to provide maximum growth for all officers, it may need to rethink the timelines commonly accepted for selection to senior officer leadership positions, and

possibly that for promotion to brigadier general. The figure below depicts a notional career path using the timeline commonly seen for progression to group and wing command.



**Figure 6 Career Path**  
**Source AF/DPLE**

It assumes that the officer depicted is below-the-zone (BTZ) for a least one, and more likely two promotions. It shows squadron commander complete by the 17-year point. A review of AFPC statistics reveals that, on average, the rank of lieutenant colonel is not reached until the 16-17 year point. That should imply completion of squadron command at 18-19 years. Similarly, the figure depicts group command beginning around the 20-year point. At present, officers who reach the rank of colonel in due course are in the zone for promotion at the 21-year point. Realizing this is a notional, generic career path, one would expect to see some deviation from the “due course,” but at present, it seems to support the notion that BTZ is necessary to achieve senior leadership positions. However, the generic career path depicted does support the

timeline necessary to become a general officer. At present, the 24-year point is the “heart of the envelope” for selection to brigadier general in the Air Force.<sup>30</sup> With early promotion to major no longer possible, the Air Force may be setting a timeline that is unrealistic. By expecting its top leaders to not only achieve promotion BTZ at both the lieutenant colonel and colonel boards and accomplish necessary career broadening duties and a joint tour, the Air Force may very well find itself with a “bow wave” of officers reaching the 24-year point that lack the desired skills. Conversely, those who seem to have a diverse background at the 24-year point may suffer from “touch and go” assignments that failed to provide true development.

Another issue for future promotion boards is when to unmask advanced academic degrees. Under current plans, advanced academic degrees will be masked at promotion boards, possibly until the colonel board. This presents two significant issues for current and future promotion boards. First, given the existing OPR system, what methodology will promotion boards use to “draw the line” on who will and will not be promoted? The masking of advanced academic degrees was done in the past, but always resurfaced as a means of delineating between officers in the middle of the pack. The officers at the top and the bottom of the pile are easy to pick out. Unfortunately, there is often difficulty identifying the right place to draw the promotion cutoff line. Although getting an advanced academic degree unrelated to a career field is not optimum, it should also be noted that acquiring new knowledge is never a waste. Research indicates that any challenging mental activity develops new neural networks in the brain, thereby increasing overall intelligence.<sup>31</sup>

Second, should the Air Force chose to unmask advanced academic degrees at the colonel board, there is a side effect of Force Development that must be considered. The Air Force stated that if it wants an officer to have an advanced academic degree, it will pay for it and provide the

time necessary to obtain it. Even with the projected increases in PME opportunities, not everyone will have a chance to attend. Consider the following scenario. Someone who is a major now and is not chosen to attend IDE will not likely get the chance to attend SDE either. Essentially, the Air Force has told the officer, “You do not need an advanced academic degree.” The officer is then selected for lieutenant colonel without an advanced academic degree, has good OPRs, developmental assignments, and is possibly even a squadron commander. Therefore, the officer is comfortable with a reasonable chance for promotion to Colonel. At this point, his Officer Selection Brief (OSB) now shows up at the promotion board without an advanced academic degree for the first time in his career. This tells the promotion board that the Air Force did not believe the officer had sufficient potential to warrant attending PME. Unless a Definitely Promote is given by the Senior Rater, the officer is likely to be passed over for promotion. As officers realize this pitfall exists, they will feel obliged to get an advanced academic degree on their own as hedge against not attending IDE or SDE. This puts the Air Force precisely back into the situation that currently exists. To further support the view that advanced academics will again be a determinant for promotion to Major or Lieutenant Colonel, supervisors are still advising their company grade officers to continue work on advanced academic degrees on their own time.

Another consideration for the Air Force is to revamp the promotion board process by eliminating the existing Promotion Recommendation Form (PRF). The figure below is also taken from the Navy’s Fitness Report. Blocks 42 and 43 are marked on every report an officer receives. The Navy regulations stipulate what percentage of officers can receive the Must Promote or Early Promote rankings based on the number of officers of the same rank that the senior rater is evaluating.<sup>32</sup> There is no separate PRF provided and the promotion board uses the

current and previous report recommendations to build a picture of the officer and decide on potential for advancement to higher rank. In the event that a particular rater is unusually harsh or lenient, the Navy provides information to the promotion board about the senior rater to normalize the rankings against other officers. A system such as this will also help provide a better force in the long run by requiring an officer to have sustained performance to be most eligible for promotion. Long-term effort, steadfastness and, a genuine desire to improve the Air Force would hold more sway in promotions than a sudden burst of effort as promotion time nears.

Promotion Recommendation	NOB	Significant Problems	Progressing	Promotable	Must Promote	Early Promote	44. Reporting Senior Address
42. INDIVIDUAL							
43. SUMMARY							
45. Signature of Reporting Senior					46. Signature of Individual Evaluated. "I have seen this report, been apprised of my performance, and understand my right to make a statement." I intend to submit a statement. <input type="checkbox"/> do not intend to submit a statement. <input type="checkbox"/>		
Date:					Date:		
Member Trait Average:		Summary Group Average:			Date:		
47. Typed name, grade, command, UIC, and signature of Regular Reporting Senior on Concurrent Report							
Date:							

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**Figure 7 Navy Promotion Recommendation**

Kotter provides a great example of resistance to change caused by people doing business in the same old way. A company had taken great care to implement the change using Kotter's eight steps, but there was still resistance. Drilling down into the issue, it was discovered that the personnel structures used for evaluations and promotions were never changed to match the vision.<sup>33</sup> Without significant change to both the Officer Evaluation and Promotion Systems, Air Force officers will tend to cling to the old ways of doing business to remain competitive for

promotion and to ensure their subordinates are best positioned should the latest changes be reversed under a new Chief of Staff.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Conclusion**

Major change is a complicated process that can take years to fully implement in a large organization. The Air Force's new Force Development construct as it applies to the officer corps is certainly part of a complex process with complicated structures. The changes implemented in officer development are the first steps in improving the long-term professionalism, knowledge, and leadership of the Air Force. However, bureaucratic organizations tend to be resistant to change and care must be taken to ensure success of change initiatives.

To quickly review, there are two major initiatives underway to change the way the officer corps is developed. The first focuses on the educational opportunities afforded to officers through increased changes for professional military education and advanced academic degrees. The second is to establish career development teams to guide officer development over the course of a career. By understanding and reviewing Force Development changes as applied using John Kotter's eight steps to leading change, the Air Force can improve its opportunity to affect a meaningful and long-lasting improvement in the officer corps.

First, establish a sense of urgency by explaining the pitfalls of the current process and ensure that officers at all levels understand. Current anecdotal evidence indicates that many mid-level company grade officers are apathetic to the changes. Second, create a guiding coalition of well-qualified, highly credible leaders who are in touch with younger officers. Strive to know what they feel is necessary for their growth and quality of life. Third, develop a

vision and strategy that recognizes that not everyone will reach the rank of general officer. No longer should the focus be developing a few great leaders, but rather the goal must be to lift the entire officer corps to a new level of education, development, and excellence. Fourth, communicate the change vision to all levels. The message must be communicated, by various media. The key to reaching and imbuing this change in the officer corps is to repeat, repeat, repeat the message and make sure the supervisors are presenting the message as it was intended. Fifth, empower broad-based action to generate new ideas and creative ways of implementing the change, but also be prepared to remove obstacles. If necessary, replace supervisors who are dragging their feet or who are naysayers. Sixth, generate short-term wins to prove that the changes are successful and that hard work is paying off. Once again, communication to all levels is a crucial element to build support and clearly reward the people who made the changes. Seventh, consolidate the gains and produce more change to keep momentum high and reduce the opportunity for regression. Codify the changes through instructions and doctrine so the next crop of assignments officers or squadron commanders, or MAJCOM personnel directorates can grasp what has happened so far and be prepared to take officer development to the next level. Last, but certainly not least, is the eighth step. Anchor the change in the culture to build for long-term success. An entire generation of officers must grow under the new system before it truly becomes a part of the culture. In addition, the Air Force must align its personnel structures to the vision.

Both officer evaluation and promotion processes need an extensive overhaul. Inflation of reports with no meaningful feedback on next assignment or leadership potential can easily hamstring the desire to provide the right person at the right place at the right time. Likewise, the promotion system, with years of on-again, off-again masking of advanced academic degrees is

viewed as suspect by officers from colonel down to lieutenant. There is no doubt that these are monumental undertakings, but both are necessary to anchor the changes in the culture.

This paper has covered a broad canvas of issues surrounding officer development, but it has done so in an attempt to lay a strong foundation for the biggest changes to United States Air Force officer to occur in decades, and ensure its enduring success.

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## End Notes

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<sup>1</sup> General John Jumper to all Air Force members, Chief's Sight Picture, subject: Total Force Development, 6 November 2002.

<sup>2</sup> Colonel William Hudson, Air Education and Training Command Director of Personnel, interviewed by the author, 5 Dec 2003.

<sup>3</sup> John H. Zenger and Joseph Folkman, *The Extraordinary Leader* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2002), 255.

<sup>4</sup> John P. Kotter, *Leading Change* (Boston, Mass.: Harvard Business School Press, 1996), 21.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid 35-36.

<sup>6</sup> Majors Hermeon, Lyon, Martens, and Walker, "An Investigation of Relationships of USAF Psychological Types," Research Report no. 95-05 (Maxwell AFB, Ala.: Air Command and Staff College, 1995), 66.

<sup>7</sup> Isabel Briggs Myers, *Introduction to Type* (Palo Alto, Cal.: Consulting Psychologists Press, Inc., 1998), 34.

<sup>8</sup> Kotter, 44.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>11</sup> SOS students Sep-Dec 2003 and AY 2004 ACSC students interviewed by the author, multiple dates 2003-2004.

<sup>12</sup> Marshall and Molly G. Sashkin, *Leadership That Matters* (San Francisco, Cal: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2003), 93.

<sup>13</sup> Zenger and Folkman, 16.

<sup>14</sup> Edgar F. Puryear, Jr., *American Generalship* (Novato, Cal.: Presidio Press, 2002), 188.

<sup>15</sup> Warren Bennis, *On Becoming A Leader* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley Publishing Co., 1995), 202

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 192.

<sup>17</sup> Kotter, 90.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 122.

<sup>19</sup> Author's discussions with Air War College classmate.

<sup>20</sup> Kotter, 132.

<sup>21</sup> Puryear, 142.

<sup>22</sup> Kotter., 109.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 115.

<sup>24</sup> Author's experience in squadron command and in-depth discussions with wing and group commanders while serving as squadron commander and later as Chief of Senior Officer Assignments, Headquarters Air Education and Training Command.

<sup>25</sup> Air Force Personnel Center Historical Data on Officer Promotions to Lieutenant Colonel, 2003, on-line, Internet, available from, [www.afpc.randolph.af.mil/demographics/nu\\_demos/promotions/LAF%20Ltc2003.xls](http://www.afpc.randolph.af.mil/demographics/nu_demos/promotions/LAF%20Ltc2003.xls)

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<sup>26</sup> Air Force Personnel Center Historical Data on Officer Promotions to Lieutenant Colonel, 2002, on-line, Internet, available from, [www.afpc.randolph.af.mil/demographics/nu\\_demos/promotions/LAF%20Historical.xls](http://www.afpc.randolph.af.mil/demographics/nu_demos/promotions/LAF%20Historical.xls)

<sup>27</sup> BUPERSINST 1610.10, *Navy Performance Evaluation and Counseling System*, 2 August 1995, 1.

<sup>28</sup> Zenger and Folkman, 151.

<sup>29</sup> John W. Gardner, *On Leadership* (New York: The Free Press, 1990), 171.

<sup>30</sup> Air Force Senior Leader Management Office historical statistics from 2000 through 2002 Brigadier General Selection Boards. In 2000, the average was 24.1 years, 25.6 in 2001, and 23.7 years in 2002.

<sup>31</sup> Zenger and Folkman, 254.

<sup>32</sup> BUPERSINST 1610.10, 5.

<sup>33</sup> Kotter, 110.